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Guinan - 343-5634

The sealskin research and development program was announced by Secretary Udall last March. At that time he said the Fouke Fur Company of Greenville, S. C., was being awarded a five-year production contract for processing and selling seven-eighths of the sealskins harvested in the years 1963 to 1967. Secretary Udall said then that one-eighth of the sealskins harvested during the period were being reserved for experimental contracts with interested and qualified fur processing concerns. The contract with the Fouke Fur Company was signed April 30, 1965.

Donald L. McKernan Director of Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, said that under the new contracts all sealskins used in the research remain the property of the Government. He said most of the skins eventually will be sold at auction, and the Bureau anticipates that the proceeds will offset the cost of the research and development work.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries manages the Alaska fur seal herd, comprising some 1,500,000 animals, under provisions of the North Pacific Fur Seal Conservation Convention. Each summer when the herd congregates on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, the Bureau harvests 50,000 to 80,000 surplus young animals on a sustained yield basis. Under the Convention terms, in return for abstaining from harvesting fur seals at sea, Canada and Japan each receive 15 percent of the annual Pribilof Islands harvest, as well as a proportionate share of the sealskins taken by the Soviet Union on smaller rookeries off the Asian coast.

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